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The purpose of this study is to help State departments of education fulfill their communications obligation and to acquaint education officials with the problems, prejudices, and power of the capital news corps. The study interprets questionnaire responses from and selected interviews with capital correspondents in 35 States. The need for educators to communicate with many news audiences is discussed and the advantages of developing a professional relationship with veteran newsmen are pointed out. Responses to the questionnaire by the capital news corps are discussed concerning (1) the correspondents' personal and professional backgrounds, (2) their ranking of State officials and agencies in the order of their importance as news sources, (3) their opinion of the need for State departments of education information directors and their relationship with the present information directors, (4) the professional and personal characteristics an information director should possess, (5) the major problems encountered in reporting education news, and (6) the most newsworthy education trends, programs, and problems. (HW)

Educators Meet the Press

A Communication Gap at the State Capital

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Educators Meet the Press

A Communication Gap at the State Capital

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by Carroll G. Lance

A staff report
of Project Public Information

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Preface

This publication is an effort to help state departments of education fulfill their communications obligation. More specifically, it has been written to acquaint education officials with the problems, prejudices and power of a unique group of journalists — the capital news corps. Hopefully, this publication will help state departments of education strengthen their relationship with the 400-plus newsmen assigned to the 50 state capitals.

A study by the author revealed that most state departments of education do not enjoy a satisfactory professional relationship with their capital news corps. This unfortunate situation was indicated in comments and criticisms by capital correspondents throughout the nation.

Detailed questionnaires were distributed to capital correspondents* in all 50 states, and newsmen in 35 states responded. Every area of the country was represented in this study, which elicited responses in state capitals from Augusta, Maine, to Sacramento, California, and from Salem, Oregon, to Tallahassee, Florida. Personal interviews also were conducted in 12 of these 35 states. The personal interviews revealed such a uniformity of attitudes and opinions that it was not deemed necessary to extend this type of questioning to a larger number of states.

The study indicated that one of two attitudes commonly arrest the development of many satisfactory professional relationships between state departments of education and capital newsmen. Either (1) education officials question the value of creating a continuing relationship with a group of journalists whose prime responsibility is reporting the political process or (2) they are convinced that most capital correspondents are not interested in education news.

An objective and practical assessment of the education department's "status" in state government discredits the first attitude. Each department of education is located in the state capital and exists in the same political environment that surrounds the highway department, park service, welfare board, or governor's office. As distasteful as this may be to many professional educators, it is a fact that cannot be escaped by a refusal to recognize it. While their programs and activities may not be politically motivated and their leadership may have no political ambitions, state departments of education are subject to the same attention that is given all public-supported agencies. Capital newsmen recognize no special character about education in general or state departments of education in particular that exempts them from the discomfort of journalistic inquiry.

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*For the purposes of this study, capital correspondents were identified as newsmen permanently assigned to the state capital. Political writers stationed in the state capital only when the legislature or general assembly is in session were not included.

The second attitude contributing to the poor relationship between education departments and newsmen also is invalid, if the testimony of capital correspondents is accepted as accurate and sincere. In an attempt to determine their interest in education, the author provided capital newsmen a list of 10 key government officials and state agencies and asked the reporters to identify the individuals and agencies that command most of their attention. The results were surprising to the author and probably will be shocking to many state department of education officials. State departments of education were ranked third. Only the activities of the governor and cabinet officers were considered more newsworthy.

If state department of education officials will concede that their agency is a legitimate news source for capital correspondents and accept as valid the newsmen's expressed interest in their activities, a stronger relationship between the two is inevitable.

The next section of this publication discusses the need for educators to communicate with many news audiences — including the capital news corps — and points out the advantages of developing a professional relationship with these veteran newsmen.

The other chapters reflect the capital news corps' response to a six-part questionnaire.* Capital newsmen were asked to (1) provide personal and professional background information, (2) rank state officials and agencies in the order of their importance as news sources, (3) indicate if there is a need for state department of education information directors and comment on their own relationship with the information directors now employed, (4) identify the professional and personal characteristics an information director should

*See appendix for copy of questionnaire.

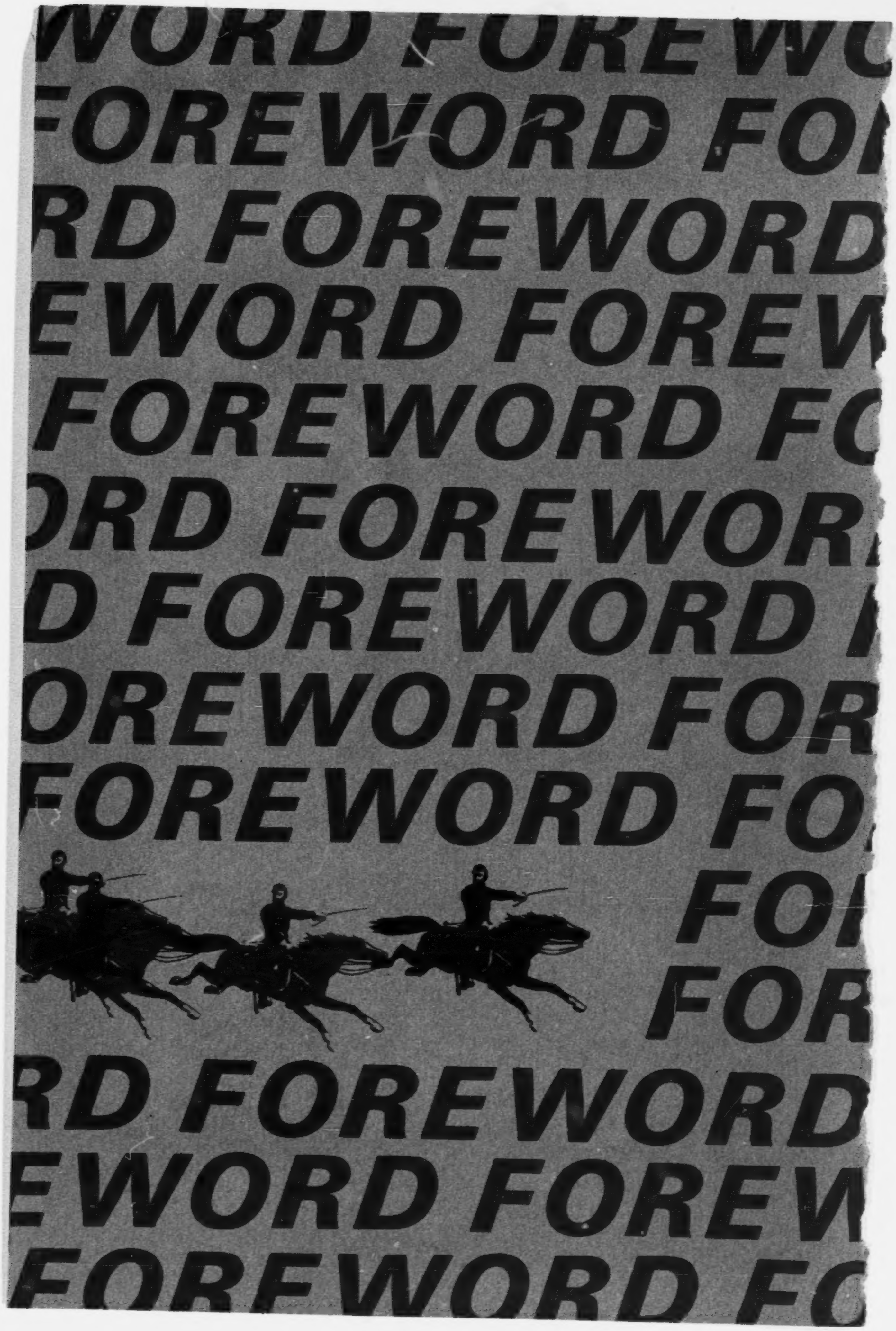
possess, (5) point out the major problems encountered in reporting education news, and (6) indicate the most newsworthy education trends, programs, and problems.

Hopefully, this publication will be helpful to the individuals assigned the specific responsibility of directing the department's information and communications program. Equally as important, I trust, it will be of some value to the chief state school officers and their key assistants in the role of communicators.

The author is grateful to the 115 capital correspondents who participated in this study. This includes 94 who completed the questionnaire and 21 who agreed to personal interviews. I am particularly indebted to The Associated Press and United Press International bureau chiefs in 23 states who distributed the questionnaires to selected colleagues in their respective news corps. The response from these wire service representatives and the cooperation of newspaper, radio and television correspondents, as well as information secured from personal interviews and questionnaires in 12 other states, provided a wealth of valuable material.

Carroll Lance
Tallahassee, Florida,
April, 1968

Foreword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Foreword

The role and the image of the educator have changed. The educator no longer enjoys the questionable luxury of an apathetic public or disinterested news media. Landmark court decisions, substantial financial support by an education-conscious Congress, and increasingly generous funding by state legislatures account for part of the change. Growing protest from tax-burdened property owners, teacher militancy, and student unrest have also contributed to this swift and, for the most part, unexpected change in the educator's public image.

For the first time in his professional career, the educator finds himself in the spotlight of public opinion. He is discovering many new and sometimes hostile audiences who are awaiting answers to vital questions. "Why," educators ask each other, "are we suddenly being asked to justify changes and explain new programs that obviously benefit the children?" There are many reasons, of course. Floyd Christian, Florida's state superintendent of public instruction, has suggested a simple explanation of considerable merit:

"For years we shared the same image as the family doctor. We told parents not to worry about their children's education and assured them we would handle this simple and relatively inexpensive responsibility. We only asked that they accept — and pay for — a time-proven prescription. Since it was the same academic medicine they had taken as children, they faithfully paid the bills and continued to respect our judgment. However, we gradually recognized the need to change the prescription and for various reasons it became more expensive. Since they had accepted our wisdom in the past, we felt no obligation to explain the new ingredients. After all, we rationalized, they are not professionally trained to appreciate the advantages of these changes so let's not confuse them."

Christian cites the educators' failure to explain these changes as "our first mistake." He also points out that many "non-teaching" personnel were added to the school staff without an accompanying explanation. These "non-teaching" personnel included guidance counselors, teaching consultants, audio-visual experts, social workers and school psychiatrists.

"As the burden of increasing costs grew heavier and children began embarrassing their parents by asking for assistance in solving the new math, these heretofore passive parents sat up and took a new look at education. Suddenly they recognized that we had changed the prescription. They realized the increasing costs of education could not be completely attributed to the mushrooming student enrollment. Sure, they could understand the need for additional classrooms and more teachers to accommodate the population explosion, but what about the other changes? What was wrong with the old math?"

Christian notes that many parents were upset by their discovery that the time-honored academic prescription had been changed. They promptly accused educators of abandoning the Three R's and then began questioning the employment of the "non-teaching" personnel.

"But our troubles had only begun," Christian has said. "While we were recovering from the avalanche of hostile inquiries by parents, we began to hear rumblings of an internal revolution. The teachers who had been obediently passing out our academic medicine for years suddenly spoke up and told us they wanted to be included in any plans to change the ingredients of all future prescriptions. The crowning blow came when the students, who had been taking the prescription for years without protest, abruptly decided it didn't taste good any more."

Christian says these growing protests finally convinced educators they had not prepared the parents, the teachers or the students for the changes made in the traditional academic prescription. In essence, he said educators had failed to communicate with their three most important audiences about the need for the changes.

"Hopefully," Christian concludes, "we now realize that we must become effective communicators if we expect to gain public support for the critically needed improvements in our educational system."

While some professional educators will not agree with Superintendent Christian's theory about the current unrest, it should be apparent that educators must improve their lines of communication. Educators, particularly those in positions of leadership, must create a meaningful dialogue with their many new audiences. They can no longer afford to limit their communications to the PTA, alumni associations and professional education groups who are popularly identified as "friends of education." Many citizens have neither the time nor the desire to participate actively in groups or associations that are designed to develop a sympathetic understanding of education problems. Some of them fear they will hear "only one side of the story" from the leadership of this type organization.

Dr. Stephen H. Chaffee reports in *Journalism Quarterly* (Winter 1967) that the majority of citizens believe school-connected organizations are not as objective as the mass media when reporting education activities. Chaffee says a 1966 national survey of public opinion about education revealed that ". . . the mass media seem to be viewed by the public as more 'neutral' sources of information than are channels that are connected with schools."

The communication ability of school-connected groups is especially limited in reaching non-parents. "Those who have no children in school consistently describe the school board, parent organizations and personal contact with school officials as less helpful than do school parents," Chaffee reports. "For example, among those whose children are not in school, both radio and television are rated more useful than the school board or parent organization."

The public is looking at education with a new awareness and is seeking a clearer understanding of the changes taking place in its mushrooming school system. Logically, the improved communication necessary for a clearer understanding should be initiated by educators, not by aroused taxpayers who are experiencing a belated compulsion to "search for the answers."

The mass media — particularly newspapers — offer an established avenue of effective communication for educators who are sincere in their efforts to provide the public with more timely and detailed information. This conclusion is also supported by the 1966 national public opinion survey on education. Chaffee writes, "Of all these potential sources,* only the newspaper was described as 'helpful' or 'very helpful' by a majority of the respondents. The difference is large enough that one may conclude that the newspapers are, on the whole, doing a better job of informing the public about schools than are school personnel or formal organizations presumably established for that purpose."

The national survey further revealed that parents as well as non-parents were equally reliant on the mass media for information about education. "These evaluations of the media are rather similar regardless of the parental status of the respondents," Chaffee says. "That is, newspapers are rated as equally helpful, and radio and television consistently less so, whether the person is a parent of a school child, or a pre-schooler or one who has graduated or has never had children. Thus, the mass media seem to be reaching all of the 'publics' with similar effect."

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*The potential sources of education information listed in the national survey were newspapers, radio, television, school boards, parents organizations, local teachers and school administrators.

The news media's demonstrated effectiveness in informing the general public about education, then, clearly indicates the value of developing a meaningful relationship with capital newsmen.

While the news media certainly are not the complete answer to keeping the public informed, most education officials will admit they have been negligent in developing a professional relationship with newspaper, radio and television correspondents assigned to the state capital. In fairness to educators, however, it should be pointed out that this communications void existed for years because the news media displayed little interest in education.

All too often the news media limited their coverage of education to a picture of the state school superintendent delivering a graduation address at the local high school or a one-paragraph announcement reminding parents that their children must register for the approaching school year. Many weary educators who now find themselves the subject of frequent news conferences and interviews vividly remember when the football coach was the prime source of school news. This situation no longer exists.

The same conditions that caused a complacent public to take a more serious look at its school system prompted the news media, including the capital news corps, to focus attention on the previously-ignored educator.

To the satisfaction of some and despite the objection of others, educators are considered valuable news sources. Newsmen seek them out and expect a response. The far-sighted educator appreciates this new relationship with the news media and realizes it offers an excellent opportunity to speak up frankly and forcefully on critical issues. He also is painfully aware that success or failure in his new role as a communicator will vitally affect the public's attitude toward education.

Education officials who, for various reasons, are reluctant to work with the news media should recognize the value of developing professional relationships with capital correspondents. From a practical standpoint, the capital newsmen offer one of the most powerful communications avenues available to state departments of education. There are two obvious reasons for creating a continuing dialogue with these veteran reporters.

First, the capital news corps reaches a larger audience than any other group of newsmen in the state. The capital news corps in most states includes representatives of The Associated Press, United Press International, most of the major daily newspapers and some of the larger radio and television stations. In several predominantly rural states that have no major daily newspapers or large television stations with correspondents in the state capital, the capital news corps may consist of only one wire service reporter. However, even the most sparsely populated areas in most states are serviced by a radio station, and it is difficult to find a radio station that does not subscribe to the services of either The Associated Press or the United Press International.

Since one or the other of the two wire services reaches almost every daily newspaper and radio or television station, there is some assurance that education news can be reported to the bulk of the population in every state. The presence of capital correspondents from the larger metropolitan centers guarantees even more extensive coverage for urban areas.

Second, the stories filed by the capital newsmen will be given priority treatment by the regional wire editors, state editors of major daily newspapers, and news directors for radio and television stations throughout the state. The veteran newsmen who staff the wire service bureaus and the equally-experienced reporters who represent daily newspapers and radio or television stations in the capital enjoy considerable prestige among their colleagues. The wire services would not maintain bureaus in the capital and other major media would not assign top reporters to cover government activities if they did not intend to publish the resulting stories.

It is important that state departments of education recognize that their communication problems are more difficult than those of local school districts and more frustrating than those of their sister state agencies.

Located in the capital, the department of education is physically removed from the majority of citizens it seeks to serve. Unlike the local school district, it cannot communicate as easily with parents through the student, local PTA or local news media. Most students do not even know that the state department exists, and only a few parents understand — much less appreciate — the role of the department. A series of "man-on-the-street" interviews conducted by Project Public Information representatives in six widely separated areas of the country indicated that many adults could not identify the chief state school officer in their state while an even greater number had only a vague idea of the responsibilities assigned the state department of education.

Most of the local news media recognize the existence of the state department of education but they identify the local school board, the local superintendent and the principal at the neighborhood school as the official spokesmen for education. While a few of the daily newspapers in large metropolitan areas employ education writers who have established continuing communications with the state education department's information office, this is the exception rather than the rule. An in-depth statewide news media survey in South Carolina taken in February, 1967, revealed that only 32 per cent of the newspapers, radio and television stations have a staff member who reports education news with any regularity. The survey further indicated that only 4 per cent of those now operating without education writers plan to establish such a position.

The nature of a state department of education's activities also handicaps its efforts to communicate with the public. In contrast to some of the other state agencies, like the highway department or park service, a department of education is not identified with tangible improvements that enable the cost-conscious taxpayer to determine if he is getting his money's worth. State education departments are supposed to provide leadership, promote innovation, perform professional services and pave the way for necessary change. None of these activities are as evident to the taxpayer as the four-laning of an existing two-lane highway, the completion of a new expressway or the opening of a new state park.

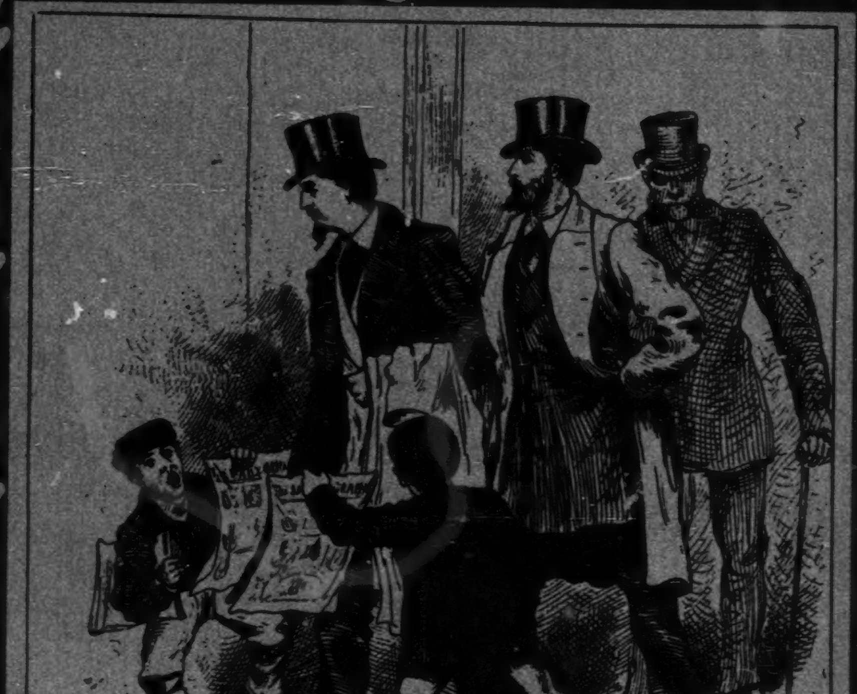
These two conditions — a physical isolation from the general public and the performance of intangible services — are compelling reasons for developing a strong relationship with the capital news corps. The capital newsmen's interest in events of statewide significance plus their ability to report intangible achievements in a manner that makes them even more newsworthy than obvious physical improvements will help state departments of education overcome these two communications handicaps.

A Communication Gap at the State Capital

Gap at the Capital

Gap at the Capital

Gap at the Capital



A Communication Gap at the State Capital

Prior to this study, several educators suggested that state departments of education do not enjoy a close relationship with capital correspondents because these newsmen do not consider education newsworthy.

To determine if this assumption was valid, capital correspondents were asked to rank 10 key government officials and major state agencies in order of importance according to their news value. The officials and agencies included on the ballot were selected from those usually visited by capital correspondents on their regular beat. To insure complete freedom of choice, the newsmen were instructed to write in the name of any official or agency considered more newsworthy than those listed on the questionnaire.

In tabulating the rankings, a first place vote was assigned 10 points, a second place vote nine points, and so forth. The results were as follows:*

*If all of the 94 newsmen who returned questionnaires had voted for 10 officials and agencies, every ballot would have been worth 55 points. The 94 completed ballots would have totaled 5,170 points. The votes recorded from the questionnaires actually totaled 4,524. This difference between possible votes and actual votes resulted from incomplete ballots by 23 newsmen. Seven of these newsmen ranked more than five but less than 10 agencies and officials; the remaining 16 newsmen ranked less than five.

Several other government institutions — including the state supreme court, public service commission, revenue commission, fish and game commission, motor vehicle commission and conservation department — appeared on ballots as write-ins, but none earned enough votes to replace any of the 10 officials and agencies listed on the questionnaire.

Ranking	Total Points	Official or Agency
1	810	Governor
2	702	Cabinet officers
3	669	State department of education
4	591	State highway department
5	389	State department of public safety
6	374	State welfare department
7	318	State health department
8	221	State park service
9	191	State industrial commission
10	138	State forestry department
	121	All others (write-in selections)

The Number Three rank assigned to the state department of education clearly contradicts the suggestion that capital correspondents are not interested in education.

An analysis of the individual rankings and accompanying comments by newsmen indicates that state departments of education would have received more votes if the superintendent of public instruction had not been included in the cabinet officer category.

Two newsmen — John Keefe of the *Wisconsin State Journal* and DeMar Teuscher of the *Salt Lake City Deseret News* — indicated that they consider the superintendent of public instruction and the department of education as one news source. Both of these capital correspondents underlined superintendent of public instruction when voting for cabinet officers and neither assigned any points to the state department of education.

The superintendent of public instruction was identified as a cabinet officer on the ballot because this position is a constitutional office in several states and is popularly identified as a cabinet position in many others. Listing both the superintendent of public instruction and the state department of education on the ballot naturally reduced the total points credited to the education department. However, it would be unrealistic to assume that the state department of education would have been ranked Number Two rather than Number Three if the state superintendent had not been included in the cabinet officer category. The collective activities of the secretary of state, the attorney general, the state comptroller, the state treasurer, and the secretary of agriculture obviously command more attention from the news media than the combined activities of the state superintendent and the state department of education.

Personal interviews provided additional evidence that capital correspondents consider education newsworthy. To demonstrate his continuing interest in education, George Thurston, a veteran television correspondent in Tallahassee, Florida, provided a list of 107 filmed news stories (one to three minutes in length) that he prepared during one calendar year. These education news reports represented more than a fourth of the total film footage he provided his television stations during that period.

Other capital correspondents reviewed their files and produced numerous stories about education. It was noted, however, that the spokesman for education in most of these stories was not the chief state school officer or a member of his professional staff. The most common answer to this observation was the reply that few state departments of education initiate contact with newsmen. Several of the capital correspondents indicated that professional educators are reluctant to comment on current education issues and, in most instances, deliberately avoid any public disagreement with "the administration" on major programs.

Bo Byers, capital bureau chief for the *Houston Chronicle*, noted a "hesitancy on the part of the commissioner or division heads to speak out on controversial issues unless they are presenting a generally popular view." Jack Jones, the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat's* capital bureau chief, identified the "reluctance of officials to discuss issues" as the most serious problem he faces in attempting to report education news. Michael Ross, capital reporter for Newhouse Broadcasting in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, cited a "hesitancy on the part of educators — especially those in state and local government — to relate full facts because of fear of not presenting administration picture" as a serious handicap to education reporting.

Edison Whipple, the *Toledo Blade* bureau chief in Columbus, Ohio, was critical of the "reluctance of educators to admit that a particular problem exists." He qualified his criticism by pointing out that his contact with the state department of education is limited because the *Blade's* education editor handles most of the major education stories. Don Wasson, an experienced government affairs reporter who covers the capital beat in Alabama for the *Montgomery Advertiser*, charged, "Educators are afraid to say what's on their mind for fear of alienating some politician."

The reluctance on the part of top education officials to publicly express their views on current issues was repeatedly cited as a deterrent to improved relations between capital correspondents and state departments of education.

Several capital correspondents said their relationship with state departments of education primarily involved checking facts and figures used by the governor, legislators and others as they debated education issues.

Many newsmen testified to the cooperative attitude of education department officials in performing research but appeared puzzled by the passive role played by the department's professional staff during controversies about education.

Every newsman interviewed agreed that the attitude and activities of the chief state school officer determine to a great extent the value of the state department of education as a news source.

In states where the chief state school officer assumes a leadership role and speaks out on current education issues, the education department usually enjoys a relationship with the news media that invites inquiry and promotes better communications.

This conclusion is supported by the news value ranking assigned to departments of education in states where the chief state school officer is aggressive and outspoken. Three of the five capital correspondents interviewed in Sacramento, California, ranked the state department of education ahead of all other state agencies as a news source, and all five of them acknowledged that their interest in the department was prompted by the activities of Superintendent Max Rafferty.

In states where the chief state school officer and the professional staff assume a passive role, the department is usually void of newsworthy activity and confines its activities to record keeping. Don Warne of the *Arizona Republic,* who has worked in the capitals of both Florida and Arizona, claims that the size of the state — and consequently the size of the state agencies — has little influence on their value as a news source. He points out, "There is virtually no oil and gas production here, yet the Oil and Gas Commission produced 20 times more news than the huge, sprawling Department of Public Instruction."

In summary, the capital correspondents consider all state departments of education as legitimate news sources but acknowledge that they will seek answers to education questions elsewhere if the education departments choose to remain silent on current and important issues.

Beginners Are Scarce in Capital News Corps

A thoughtful examination of the capital newsmen's personal background and professional experience should be helpful to chief state school officers and their key assistants, particularly state department of education information directors.

Newsmen who participated in this national study provided background information that identified several characteristics common to most capital correspondents. These characteristics should be acknowledged because they are qualities that invite appreciation and encourage a close professional relationship between newsmen and educators.

The study revealed that most capital correspondents are young but mature, married, well-educated, and have considerable professional training.

The average age of the 94 capital correspondents who completed the questionnaire was 35. Only seven of the newsmen who participated in the study were less than 26 years old. The majority — 58 of 94 — were between the ages of 27 and 40.

All but 12 of the newsmen were married. Of the 82 married reporters, 77 had school-age children. Their educational training is particularly impressive. Only 11 of the 94 respondents were not college graduates. Five of those who did not complete four years of college were junior college graduates or had a minimum of two years college training. Seven had post-graduate degrees.

The reporters' professional experience is as impressive as their educational training. The average capital correspondent had 13 years of news media experience. The least experienced capital newsman who participated in the study was Jack Nagle, a 23-year-old radio correspondent for the Susquehanna Broadcasting Company. With one and a half years of experience, he covers the capital beat in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The most experienced capital correspondent who responded to the questionnaire is Emmet O'Brien, a Gannett News Service reporter with 38 years of experience. He is assigned to the capital bureau in Albany, New York.

These five characteristics — age, marital status, maturity, educational training and professional experience — should be carefully considered by educators attempting to develop a professional relationship with capital correspondents.

The capital newsmen's average age of 35 suggests that these correspondents are young enough to appreciate many of the changes proposed by state departments of education and yet mature enough to recognize the value of retaining those traditional practices and programs that have worked successfully over the years.

The nature of the responsibilities assigned state departments of education should offer a special appeal to these relatively young newsmen. Logically, they should be more interested in the programs of a government agency that promotes innovation and encourages change than they are in the activities of a department or commission that enforces regulations and performs record-keeping chores.

The marital status of the capital correspondents also may lend itself to a sympathetic understanding of a state education department's activities. Approximately 90 per cent of the capital newsmen are married, and the vast majority have school-age children. The study revealed an average of two children per family.

As parents, they have an inherent interest in the activities of any individual or agency that demonstrates a determination to improve the quality of public education. They will not have to be convinced that education is important. Admittedly, their news media experience may cause them to evaluate the public school system in a more detached manner than the average parent, but this should be an asset rather than a liability. Their interest will be that of professionally-motivated newsmen as well as concerned parents.

The assertion that the average capital correspondent is mature is not based on the questionable assumption that all 35-year-old newsmen are mature individuals. There is a far more acceptable consideration that prompts this assertion. The deliberate manner in which state editors and news directors select capital correspondents limits the possibility of an immature reporter being assigned to the state capital.

The responsibilities assigned to capital correspondents require the selection of reliable newsmen who can maintain their composure in a politically-sensitive environment. They are expected to accurately reflect sensitive problems in a manner that minimizes the possibility of an irrational or emotional reaction by those who read their stories, listen to their broadcasts or view their filmed reports. Their inability to do this would have serious consequences, including that of reflecting unfavorably on the newspapers, radio or television stations they represent. State editors and news directors guard against this possibility by searching for maturity in those they assign to the state capital.

Certainly, the maturity that is identified with most capital correspondents is a valuable characteristic that should be appreciated by state department of education officials. Educators who complain of unfair criticism by immature newsmen should consider the evidence of maturity among capital newsmen. This maturity should be a welcome safeguard against minor disagreements being reported as major controversies.

This maturity is complemented by the reporters' impressive news media experience. Newsmen with an average of 13 years' experience should be equipped with reliable judgment about the relative news value of government activities.

The ability of these veteran reporters to recognize the importance of decisions made by the state board of education or the state department of education is a definite asset to communication-conscious educators attempting to gain public understanding for new ideas and innovative programs.

The capital news corps' educational background is another characteristic that should work to the advantage of progressive state departments of education. Since almost 90 per cent of the capital newsmen who participated in the national survey were college graduates, there is adequate reason to assume that they have an appreciation for improved and expanded educational opportunities. While a college degree certainly does not insure superior intelligence, it does reflect an individual's desire to better equip himself for his chosen profession by an extended educational experience.

An awareness of these five characteristics should influence the attitude and activities of state department of education officials in their relationship with capital correspondents.

Certainly, all of the capital correspondents in each of the 50 states are not 35-year-old college graduates with two children and 13 years of professional experience. It cannot be inferred, that every state department of education will find these characteristics prominently displayed and equally distributed among the members of its own capital news corps. But the survey did identify several significant characteristics among the nation's capital news corps indicating much "common ground" on which educators and newsmen can build a continuing relationship.

It would be advisable for each state department of education to make a similar survey among its own capital news corps and identify characteristics that are common to that particular group. An identification and evaluation of these characteristics should equip professional educators with a better understanding of their capital news corps and possibly enable them to develop a more receptive audience among these veteran newsmen.

Newsmen Applaud the Idea of Information Services

The third part of the questionnaire was designed to serve two purposes: (1) to determine if newsmen in state capitals without education department information directors believe the employment of such specialists is warranted, and (2) to determine if a satisfactory relationship exists in those states where education departments employ information directors.

Since it was first necessary to identify the departments of education that operate without information directors, all capital correspondents who participated in the study were asked, "Does the department of education in your state employ a public information director?"

The collective response from the 35 capital news corps was confused by the fact that newsmen in five states disagreed about the existence of an information director. In three of these states (Arizona, North Carolina and Utah), the capital correspondents were equally divided in their opinion; half said "yes" and half said "no." In the fourth state (Texas), four of the five reporters said "no" and one said "yes." In the remaining state (Missouri), three capital correspondents said "yes" and one said "no."

Capital correspondents in 11 states unanimously said "no," and all newsmen surveyed in the remaining 19 states said "yes." The disagreement about the existence of an information director in Utah, Arizona, North Carolina, Texas and Missouri can be attributed to several factors.

First, the title of the individual responsible for news media relations is often misleading. For example, Mrs. Almetta Brooks, who directs the information program for the North Carolina State Department of Education, is identified as "Editor, Publications Section." In Texas, Mrs. Virginia Cutter handles the department's information program, and she is identified as "Program Director, Informational Services." When Project Public Information compiled a national directory of public information directors in 1967, Richard Peterson was identified as the individual who handles this assignment in Utah. His title is administrative assistant to the superintendent.

Second, the education department may have assigned the information director's responsibilities to a staff member as a part-time or additional duty, and some members of the capital news corps may not be aware of this individual's dual identity. This accounts for the disagreement among the capital newsmen in Arizona. Don Warne of the *Arizona Republic* reported, "A Dr. Pickering has assumed this as a sideline." Warne's colleague, Don Bolles, simply answered "no" when asked if the education department employed an information director.

Third, the information director may have been a new employee and had not had sufficient time to establish an identity with all of the capital correspondents. This probably explains the three "yes" and one "no" vote in Missouri. When filling out his questionnaire, Rael Amos of United Press International said, "Our education department PR man has only been on the job a few months," and Larry Hall of The Associated Press called attention to "his recent appointment" when evaluating the information director's activities.

And, fourth, this lack of a uniform response among newsmen in the same capital could be attributed to the probability that the information director does not recognize the value of establishing a continuing relationship with all of the capital correspondents and has made no serious effort to work with them. Hopefully, this is not the case in any of these five states.

Since newsmen in Arizona, North Carolina and Utah contradicted each other when answering the first question (Does the department of education in your state employ a public information director?), their responses to other questions in this part of the questionnaire (pp. 3-4) were not categorized. Since four of the five capital correspondents in Texas answered "no," Texas was added to the list of states that did not have an information director. Missouri was included in the group of states that reported having information directors because three of the four newsmen answered "yes" to the first question.

Thus, for purposes of this study, 12 state departments of education were listed as operating without information directors and 20 states were credited with employing such specialists.*

In the 12 states that reported no information director, the capital correspondents were asked, "Do you believe the

*A national directory compiled by Project Public Information indicates every state but Alaska, Arizona and South Dakota has someone assigned the responsibilities of an information director, but in several instances these individuals handle such duties as a secondary or part-time assignment.

employment of a public information director by the state department of education is warranted?" Newsmen in Alaska, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and Rhode Island agreed that the department of education would be justified in hiring an information director.

Two of the newsmen in Wisconsin said "yes," one responded with a qualified "yes," and one replied, "I don't know." William Hauda of United Press International and Matt Pommer of the *Madison Capital Times* both supported the employment of an information director. John Keefe Jr. of the *Wisconsin State Journal* said he had encountered no problems when attempting to secure information from department officials but added this comment: "If, however, your sole criterion to justify the need for a PIO is 'sufficient public interest in programs,' then I would answer yes because public interest in education appears to be high in this community and state (judging by the media's usage of such news)." James Polk, capital correspondent for The Associated Press, was doubtful about the need for an information director and pointed out, "When we want information, we go directly to the officials involved."

The capital correspondents in Nevada and Nebraska uniformly said "no," while newsmen in Vermont and Texas were divided in their opinion. Michael Sinclair, correspondent for The Associated Press in Montpelier, Vermont, endorsed the employment of an information director, but Mavis Doyle, bureau chief for the *Burlington Free Press*, voted "no" and declared, "There is no need for a public information officer, as the commissioner should be able to give any information straight to newsmen."

Two of the Texas correspondents voted "yes" and two voted "no." Garth Jones of The Associated Press and Bo Byers of the *Houston Chronicle* favored the employment of an information director, while David Anderson of United Press International and Ernest Stromberger of the *Dallas Times* did not believe such a position was warranted. Stuart Long, bureau chief for Long News, which services 18 Texas daily newspapers, was the other Austin correspondent who participated in the study. He was the only newsman who acknowledged that the department of education already had an information director, and he answered "yes" to the second question, indicating he felt the position was justified.

Prior to this study, educators in many states told Project Public Information personnel that they were reluctant to employ information directors or expand the size of their existing information staff. They thought the news media would criticize them for hiring press agents. Since the majority of newsmen in only two of the 12 states did not favor the employment of qualified information directors, it appears that this reluctance is based on a popular fallacy rather than a forbidding reality.

The remaining questions (3-17) were directed to the capital news corps in the 20 states where education departments currently employ information directors. They were designed to determine if those information directors enjoy a satisfactory relationship with the capital correspondents in their respective states.

The collective response of the newsmen produced five significant conclusions: (1) many of the information directors were not qualified by training and experience, (2) less than half were qualified to serve as department spokesmen, (3) even fewer were considered reliable news sources, (4) half of them refused to confide in newsmen, and (5) less than half would willingly provide information unfavorable to the department of education.

Newsmen in only 10 of the 20 states answered "yes" when asked, "Do you believe the department of education's information director is qualified by training and experience to anticipate the needs of the news media and provide the necessary services?" The capital newsmen in Missouri, Alabama, and Ohio pointed out that the information directors in these states only recently had joined the state department of education staff; and the newsmen said they were not familiar enough with the backgrounds of these individuals to answer this question. Most of them declined to answer the remainder of the questions on this page of the questionnaire for the same reason.

While newsmen in 10 states indicated that their education department's information director was qualified by training and experience, the newsmen in only nine capitals recognized him as a spokesman for the department, and only eight of these news media delegations believed that he keeps them adequately informed about department activities.

In subsequent interviews, capital correspondents in several states claimed that the information directors they worked with were not involved in policy discussions and did not enjoy a close enough relationship with the superintendent or commissioner to qualify them as department spokesmen. One wire service reporter asserted, "I can't expect him (the information director) to express the department's point of view because I'm sure he doesn't know what it is." A television correspondent in the same capital said, "When I need a quote about the education department's position, I have to get it from the superintendent or forget it. When he's not there, nobody says anything."

Many of the newsmen said they could appreciate a chief state school officer's reluctance to have someone speak for him in his absence, but they failed to understand why they were unable to get an informed opinion from the information director that could be attributed to "a spokesman for the department of education." Randy Pendleton Jr., United Press International bureau chief in Montgomery, Alabama, said, "We need someone who knows the answers or can find them out in a hurry, and who has the authority to speak for the department."

The consensus among capital correspondents appears to be, "If the chief state school officer doesn't confide in his information director and trust his ability to reflect the department's position on current issues, he (the information director) can't be considered an informed source."

Many capital correspondents said that the willingness of an information director to confide in newsmen is a sound measure of his value. It is common practice in government circles for responsible officials to provide background information that can be attributed to "a department spokesman." It should be acknowledged, of course, that some newsmen will not accept "off the record" comments. However, many newsmen actively seek this type of information from informed officials and offer assurances that they will not reveal the source of their information.

Newsmen in 10 states reported that the information directors they work with have displayed a willingness to provide "off the record" comments. It is not surprising that these 10 information directors are the same ones that were earlier identified as being qualified by training and experience to anticipate the needs of the news media.

Eight of the information directors were reported as being willing to provide information unfavorable to the department of education. All of them were included in the group that confided in newsmen. In fairness to the other information directors, many capital correspondents acknowledged that these individuals' superiors often prevented them from providing such information. One reporter said, "If he (the information director) had a choice, he wouldn't withhold it, but if directed by a superior he would." Another newsman stated, "I don't think he would lie if I asked him a direct question, but I'm sure he wouldn't volunteer information that was unfavorable." One of the most experienced capital correspondents who participated in the study said, "He does his job and providing unfavorable information is not part of his job."

The remaining questions on Page 3 of the questionnaire were intended to determine the quality of the news releases prepared by information directors, the frequency with which the directors visit the capital news room and their availability after normal working hours.

Unfortunately, the questionnaire did not request specific information about the form and content of the news releases; nor did it provide adequate space for specific criticism. The newsmen were asked to rate the news releases they receive as excellent, good, fair or poor. Approximately 15 per cent rated the news releases excellent; 25 per cent, good; 40 per cent, fair; and 20 per cent, poor. In subsequent interviews in 12 states, many capital correspondents complained that the news releases were too long (often exceeding two pages). Others charged that the information in the releases was not timely; it contained no hard news. Several suggested that some of the information directors were writing feature stories rather than news releases. While most newsmen welcome good feature story material, they prefer to develop and write such stories themselves.

The frequency with which information directors visit the capital news room is disappointing. Only 15 per cent of the newsmen indicated that they see the information director several times a week. Another 20 per cent said they can expect a visit at least once a week, while more than half — approximately 55 per cent — said they are contacted less than once a week. The remaining 10 per cent reported that the information director has never visited their office.

While frequent visits to the capital news room certainly are not the sole answer to improved relations with capital correspondents, an information director will find it difficult to earn the respect and confidence of the news media if he does not establish a professional identity with the reporters assigned to the state capital. His visits must be meaningful to have any lasting value. The distribution of significant news releases, an announcement of major policy changes and the release of photographs or biographical information on new personnel are only a few legitimate reasons for visiting the capital news room.

Probably the most favorable finding in this part of the study was the indication that every information director contacted after normal working hours was conscientious in his efforts to assist the news media. Newsmen in 10 states said they had called the information director after 5 p.m. or during the weekend to obtain information. These correspondents reported that several information directors were able to provide answers over the phone while the others went back to their offices and secured the needed material.

In summary, it must be concluded that less than half of the 20 information directors enjoy a satisfactory relationship with their respective capital news corps. As indicated earlier, only 10 were considered to be qualified by training and experience, only nine were recognized as informed spokesmen for their departments, only eight kept the news media informed about major department activity, only 10 confided in newsmen, and only eight were willing to provide information unfavorable to their departments.

Familiarity with Department Breeds Respect

To assist the news media in reporting significant activities of a state department of education, a public information director must possess a variety of skills and characteristics. The capital correspondents were given a list of eight desirable skills and characteristics and asked to identify the ones they considered most valuable. They also were instructed to write in any other qualities they considered more valuable than the ones included on the questionnaire.

First choice was assigned eight points, second choice seven points, and so forth. A tabulation of their collective votes produced the following rank order:*

Ranking	Total Points	Skill or Characteristic
1	559	Familiarity with department programs and policies
2	487	Objectivity
3	466	Promptness in answering inquiries
4	421	Cooperative attitude
5	416	News media experience
6	336	Ability to write clearly and concisely
7	324	Ability to translate educational jargon into layman's language
8	136	Research experience
	64	All others (write-in selections)

An awareness of the value assigned to each of these skills and characteristics should be helpful to chief state school officers searching for qualified information specialists. It also should prompt other education officials to review the ability and attitude of those now assigned the responsibility of developing news media relations for their departments.

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*If all 94 newsmen had completed their ballots, a total of 3,384 points would have been recorded. Three of the capital correspondents returned only partially completed ballots and two failed to rank any of the skills and characteristics; thus, 3,209 points were recorded. The write-in selections include such qualities as creditability, truthfulness, accuracy, honest answers and public relations training. None was suggested frequently enough to rank ahead of the eight skills and characteristics listed on the questionnaire.

The capital correspondents' collective opinion that a familiarity with department programs and policies is an information director's most valuable asset should be particularly meaningful to those chief state school officers who now exclude their information directors from policy-level meetings where major decisions are made.

Tom Woods, capital correspondent for the Pacific Coast News Service in Sacramento, California, said, "I feel he (the information director) should, first and foremost, know his board and his department. There is nothing more frustrating than to be 'fixed up' with an information officer who doesn't know his 'information.' It is much more important to me to have a man with a wealth of knowledge about what his department is doing than a man who writes beautifully but takes eight hours to answer a question."

Realistically, an information director cannot be expected to possess "a wealth of knowledge about what his department is doing" unless he is present when policies are adopted and programs are approved.

Since the news media representatives expect the information director to be reliably informed about all the department's activities, the director's position in the organizational structure should afford a close working relationship with the chief state school officer and key members of the professional staff. Emmet O'Brien, chief of the Gannett News Service capital bureau in Albany, New York, emphasized this point when he selected familiarity with department programs and policies as the most desirable skill and then wrote this note beside his selection: "He also must have entree to the commissioner at all times." The suggestion that the information director should be close to the department's policy makers was supported by Robert Balme, a colleague of O'Brien's and capital bureau chief for the *Buffalo Evening Star*. Balme disregarded the entire list of skills and characteristics included on the ballot and suggested "the ability to promptly put me in touch with the highest possible news source" as the most valuable service an information director could perform. An information director could not do this effectively if he did not enjoy a close relationship with the chief state school officer and his top assistants.

While citing the need for a knowledgable information director, all of the capital correspondents expressed a preference for securing information about department activities from the chief state school officer. But they pointed out that most chief state school officers travel considerably and that, even when the chiefs are in their offices, the demands on their time are so severe newsmen often need a secondary news source to turn to. These conditions, the newsmen insisted, dictate the need for a department information director who is knowledgable and has immediate access to facts and figures.

The growing number of activities within departments of education and the increasing size of the professional staff also contribute to the need for a central source of information other than the chief state school officer. Randy Pendleton Jr., the United Press International state news director in Montgomery, Alabama, said, "Education departments have become so specialized that you have to call a half dozen people to find out what's going on. A reliable information director, a guy who knows what's going on, can tell you where the action is and save you a lot of time."

Donald Keough — capital correspondent for the News-Journal Company in Jefferson City, Missouri, before joining the *Louisville (Kentucky) Courier-Journal* in August, 1967 — agreed with Pendleton about the role of a well-informed information director. He said, "For newsmen, an information director is of greatest assistance simply by quickly finding the information requested or quickly referring a newsman to the people who can supply the information."

An information director's ability to perform these services depends on two conditions — familiarity with all of the department's programs and policies and a close working relationship with top administrative personnel. Fortunately, the trend is to elevate the information director in the organizational structure so that he can be included in the policy making meetings and can be kept informed of all major activities within the department.

Superintendent Cyril Busbee, South Carolina's progressive chief state school officer, recently completed a reorganization of the state department of education. As a result, the information director now reports directly to him. Formerly, the information director reported to an assistant superintendent and had no direct line of communication with the chief state school officer.

It is not surprising that the nation's capital correspondents ranked objectivity as the second most desirable characteristic in an information director. Working in a political environment where state officials and agencies constantly compete for public recognition and support, these newsmen are swarmed under by government press agents trying to sell their points of view. An objective information director is such a rarity that he almost immediately establishes a meaningful relationship with the capital news corps.

Tom Vinceguerra, capital bureau chief for the *Ft. Lauderdale (Florida) News*, observed, "Objective information directors are hard to find. Naturally, they're a big help to newsmen because they fill a need and serve a purpose. The few objective guys we work with are called on time and time again. The others are ignored."

Lavor Chaffin, the senior education writer in Utah who helped political editor DeMar Teuscher fill out his questionnaire, identified objectivity as open-mindedness. He offered this valuable advice to information directors who become too enthusiastic about promoting their department's activities: "I would consider open-mindedness the most important characteristic of a good public relations specialist. In the long run such a candid and honest attitude will win more friends than all the gimmicks and propagandist tactics that have ever been devised." He also cautioned information directors about attempts to conceal their mistakes or hide their problems. "Too often, public relations specialists become, unconsciously or otherwise, primarily propagandists for the agencies they represent," Chaffin said. "They are quite willing to be objective and cooperative concerning news which might be favorable, but are very reluctant about news which might reflect unfavorably on their agencies."

UPI's Randy Pendleton emphasized the need for objectivity by writing in "the willingness to report the bad as well as the good" as a desirable characteristic for information directors.

Promptness in answering inquiries (ranked third) and a cooperative attitude (ranked fourth) overlap somewhat, which probably accounts for their close proximity in the rankings.

While these characteristics are highly regarded by capital correspondents, an information director cannot expect to work successfully with the news media unless he possesses some of the other skills. But all of these skills seem to contribute to the information director's overall effectiveness. Bo Byers of the *Houston Chronicle* noted, "A man has to be familiar with department programs and policies but he isn't any help if he isn't cooperative — and vice versa."

Rael Amos, United Press International bureau chief in Jefferson City, Missouri, declined to rank the eight skills and characteristics and explained his attitude about the collective value of these qualities with this comment: "I don't believe you can list these 1 through 8. To me, the lack of any of them disqualifies the person. He has to be cooperative, for example, but if he isn't prompt, or familiar with his department, or able to express himself clearly, he is worth-less to you as a newsman." Alfred Den Beste, capital bureau chief for The Associated Press in Bismarck, North Dakota, declared, "All of these are terribly important."

The Number Five ranking assigned news media experience indicates that the capital correspondents value this characteristic. Only 71 points separated news media experience and objectivity (ranked second) and several newsmen said they identify one with the other. Jim Saggus, the veteran capital bureau chief for The Associated Press in Jackson, Mississippi, ranked news media experience Number One and said, "This (news media experience) would imply objectivity."

William Deibler, The Associated Press correspondent in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, ranked news media experience third and added a write-in characteristic that he identified as "the ability to judge the importance of news." Don Keough, who made numerous constructive comments on his questionnaire, testified to the value of reliable news judgment. He wrote, "For the department and for the people for whom he works, I would suspect they would want a man who can look at department activities and with sound news judgment decide what is most likely of value for news release."

Many information directors probably will be surprised that the ability to write clearly and concisely was not ranked higher than sixth. This was explained in subsequent interviews.

Reflecting an obvious pride in their profession, most capital correspondents insisted that an information director with news media experience would automatically possess this skill, thus they did not assign it a higher priority when ranking the characteristics individually.

It also should be acknowledged that capital correspondents have considerably less regard for news releases than most of their news media colleagues. This is understandable since they are flooded with news releases from the governor's office, members of the cabinet and almost every major state agency. Many capital correspondents use releases as sources of ideas for stories, not as legitimate news, and almost all of them rewrite the few releases that are not discarded. Thus, an information director's value to capital newsmen is not measured by his ability to write news releases, but rather by his ability to provide background information about significant department activities and to arrange interviews with knowledgable members of the professional staff.

The ability to translate educational jargon into layman's language (Number Seven) also was ranked lower than expected in view of the fact that capital newsmen identify this, (later in the questionnaire), as one of the four most serious problems they face when reporting the activities of state education departments.

However, in subsequent interviews, several of them said, this "language" problem was not identified with the news releases and publications prepared by the education department's information director and his staff. They contend that the "language barrier" arises in conversations and interviews with professional educators. Thus, the information director's ability to "translate" is not as valuable as it might appear.

The last-place ranking of research ability was not surprising for two reasons. First, capital correspondents expect an education department to be equipped with a professional research staff to perform this service. And, second, many of these newsmen are accomplished investigative reporters who prefer to perform their own research.

Four Factors Blamed for Damming Information Flow

Education is a relatively new beat for many capital correspondents. Only in recent years have the news media attempted to evaluate and report significant changes in education. Naturally, educators are equally inexperienced in dealing with newsmen. This situation has created problems that handicap the development of a satisfactory relationship between newsmen and educators.

This national study attempted to identify the major problems faced by capital correspondents who work with state departments of education on a continuing basis. The collective response of the capital news corps suggests that the following four characteristics of education department officials are the major obstacles to newsmen as they attempt to inform the public about significant education news:

1. Educators are reluctant to comment on controversial issues.

2. Educators fail to understand the role of the newsman.

3. Educators are unable to communicate effectively in laymen's language.

4. Educators do not appreciate the value of a professionally-trained information specialist who could eliminate much of the misunderstanding between educators and newsmen.

These characteristics are not ranked in order of importance but simply reflect the *four most* common criticisms of education department officials. From the capital news corps' point of view, all of them are serious problems that must be overcome if educators and newsmen hope to enjoy an acceptable professional relationship.

Most of the capital correspondents said that educators are too sensitive to criticism and complained that state department officials deliberately avoid controversial issues for fear of being criticized by those who disagree with them.

Ernest Valachovic, capital correspondent for the *Arkansas Gazette*, declared, "One problem without a solution is the reluctance of leadership in education to differ with the governor or key legislators on the basic educational needs and goals." Bob Bruce, who operates a radio-television news service in Salem, Oregon, noted "a reluctance of educators to speak out without checking with somebody else." Robert Leeright, bureau chief for The Associated Press in Cheyenne, Wyoming, cited the "reluctance of some school officials to even talk with the press" as obvious evidence that they attempt to avoid major education issues.

Since state departments of education are expected to provide the leadership for major changes in the public education system, newsmen expect the chief state school officer and his key assistants to take a definite position on issues of statewide concern. Capital correspondents believe the officials have a professional obligation to express their opinions publicly. They feel educators who respond with "no comment" or otherwise evade controversial questions are abdicating their responsibility and abandoning their leadership role.

The second handicap to improved news coverage of education — the failure to understand the role of the newsman — is a condition that is common to most state agencies. Many of the capital newsmen pointed out that educators certainly are not alone in their failure to understand a reporter's professional obligations, responsibilities and rights.

In essence, most state officials are reluctant to accept newsmen as the public's eyes and ears in the state capital. Jim Saggus, a veteran bureau chief for The Associated Press, observed, "The general attitude that government is the business of those in government" clearly indicates that most state officials believe "the people, as represented by newsmen, have no right to know anything." He cited "the tendency to use newsmen rather than work with them" as further evidence that educators do not understand the role of the newsman. He said, "They seem to be interested only in favorable publicity rather than informing the people."

Donald Keough, formerly a capital correspondent in Jefferson City, Missouri, claimed that attempts by educators "to extend petty prerogatives of the educational hierarchy to the coverage of news" indicate they don't understand the newsman's role. He recalled educators telling newsmen, "Don't use my name, use the commissioner's, but first get his permission." Such unrealistic requests contribute to the popular conclusion that educators could benefit from a short course in news media relations.

Many capital correspondents claim department of education officials have the false impression that newsmen are "out to get someone." A United Press International bureau chief said, "For some reason, they think we're working against them. If the governor, a state senator or any other responsible individual criticizes their department, they get mad at us for reporting the criticism. But when we ask them to tell their side of the story, they refuse to talk. I've had little luck explaining that we don't promote, protect, defend, criticize or attack public officials. I still haven't convinced them that our job is to report the news, not to make it." Don Wasson of the *Montgomery (Alabama) Advertiser* said, "They (educators) approach interviews with the general attitude that newsmen and newspapers aren't to be trusted."

Probably the most uniform criticism of educators is the charge that they are unable to communicate effectively in the layman's language. More than three-fourths of the newsmen listed this as a serious handicap to improved communication between educators and newsmen. The following quotes, selected from the questionnaires completed by the nation's capital news corps, indicate that this problem is widespread:

"They talk in gobbledy gook." — Bob Long, Capital News Service, Austin, Texas.

"Difficulty in explaining technical aspects of education, such as the state's school aid formula and federal aid programs." — William Haude, United Press International, Capital Bureau, Madison, Wisconsin.

"Unable to translate new programs and policies into terms that will describe grass roots impact." — David Dow, McCleatchy Broadcasting Company, Capital Bureau, Sacramento, California.

"Inability of educators to communicate in lay language about significant developments in their field." — William Yaeger, Intermountain Network, Inc., Capital Bureau, Helena, Montana.

"Lack of imagination: outlining a problem in great detail without being able to say how it affects a first-grader, for example. Double-talk: educators' inability to extract simple, clear generalities from a maze of complexities." — Thomas Carter, Copley News, Capital Bureau, Sacramento, California.

"Much of my time is spent trying to translate educationese into the King's English." — William Cote, Booth Newspapers, Capital Bureau, Lansing, Michigan.

"For some reason, the typical educator or department professional seems to be extremely verbose especially in writing reports and to some extent in answering questions orally." — Robert Crocker, The Associated Press, Capital Bureau, Augusta, Maine.

"Inability to use down-to-earth language that a taxpayer can understand." — Bob Bruce, capital correspondent, Salem, Oregon.

The problems of reporting technical or otherwise complex government programs in laymen's language is not new to capital correspondents. For years, they have been explaining to the general public the activities of highway engineers, public health officials, geologists, water resource experts and conservation specialists. Many of the newsmen volunteered the optimistic opinion that their understanding of educational jargon will "improve with age." However, they did express some concern about the attitude of professional educators who become impatient with newsmen who don't immediately comprehend the detailed implications of complicated programs.

One discouraged newsman complained, "They understand each other perfectly; so they get irritated when we keep asking them to explain something that's confusing to us. Most of them don't know the difference between a by-line and a deadline but they expect us to understand all the abbreviations and foreign terms they use."

Alfred Den Beste, The Associated Press bureau chief in Bismarck, North Dakota, suggested that educators are selfishly motivated in their continued use of education jargon. He said, "I am still convinced that much of the education jargon is an attempt to present education as a scientific discipline, which it is not."

The capital correspondents' fourth major criticism of state departments repeated a theme that was reflected throughout the study, that educators have little understanding of what makes news and would benefit from the employment of a professionally qualified information director.

Dale Enoch, the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* correspondent in Little Rock, Arkansas, charged that most educators "don't know a story if it stares them in the face." Ward Sims, The Associated Press correspondent in Juneau, Alaska, agreed. "In eight years of capital coverage I've found that most professional educators would not recognize a news story if it hit them in the face, often to their disadvantage," Sims said. "It is a failing not only among the education fraternity, but among others in government service. All government employees, top to bottom, should have the advantage of at least a short seminar on what makes news."

Sims admitted that his problems are more difficult than most of the other capital correspondents: "Because I am the lone newsman covering the Alaska state capital (state government offices), it is virtually impossible to keep in daily contact with all offices, or to keep up with everything that is going on. Too often, with other departments as well as education, I find you must have something in mind when you talk to the man in charge, or you're wasting your time talking to him, primarily because they don't know, as I mentioned above, what is news. I've never experienced any trouble getting information on something about which I've inquired, but I always wonder what it is I'm missing because the department head, with little knowledge of news, doesn't volunteer anything."

William Yaeger, capital news director of a radio network that includes 15 stations in Montana, reported "a lack of knowledge among educators over things they're doing that the public would be interested in." Additional testimony to the lack of news judgment among educators is cited in the previous chapter as evidence of a need for information directors with media experience.

The need for qualified information directors was noted by newsmen in several states. Arthur Hatton Jr., capital correspondent for The Associated Press in Providence, Rhode Island, said, "We need a public information director to help cut through the bureaucratic red tape." In New Hampshire, Carl Craft of The Associated Press contended, "It would be helpful to have a public relations man to serve as a 'go-between' to make education officials aware of the news media needs."

Jerry Scarbrough, capital correspondent for The Associated Press in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, envisioned the employment of an information director as being particularly helpful to understaffed wire service offices. He reported, "The state (department of education) has no public information director and most educators do not realize our needs; so we must attend all meetings which could turn into important ones in order to protect ourselves. This poses a problem during the busy season when the legislature is in session." The obvious implication is that some newsmen would trust the judgment of a qualified information director regarding the significance of education meetings. By alerting the capital newsmen to potentially newsworthy meetings and "protecting" them by attending the routine ones himself, an information director could perform a valuable service.

Many capital correspondents believe a qualified information director could be helpful in acquainting professional educators with the problems faced by newsmen. Michael Sinclair, The Associated Press capital correspondent in Vermont, reflected this sentiment when he described "the failure of educators to recognize the value of deadlines or the immediacy of news value" as a major problem. He endorsed the employment of an information director with the hope that it would help correct this condition.

Others agreed that an information director can be helpful, but several of them pointed out that some education departments handicap their information director by limiting his participation in policy discussions.

John Yago of the *Charleston (West Virginia) Gazette* observed "a tendency of top level officials not to take information officers into their confidence and give them top level knowledge." He said the information director he works with "is not allowed to work on board (state board of education) matters, despite his objections." Yago said, "He deals only with the department and even then isn't kept fully informed about what's going on." He cited this as "a major weakness" in the department's information program.

Kenneth Conway, assigned to The Associated Press bureau in Charleston, West Virginia, supported Yago's evaluation of the problems faced by the department's information director. Conway said, "The education information director is not given enough responsibility to handle the department's public affairs."

It should be recognized that the employment of an information director will not immediately solve all of the department's information problems or instantly improve its news media relations. Unless the chief state school officer and key members of the professional staff recognize the value of a professionally trained information specialist and assign him appropriate responsibilities, he cannot function as an effective member of the administrative family.

State departments of education frequently have trouble adjusting to the increased news media interest that follows the appointment of an information director. Donald Keough observed this situation in Missouri. He said, "It should be noted that our department of education has had an information director only for a short time and then only after urging from federal officials. Prior to appointing an information director, it was extremely difficult to obtain information and, frankly, the department is having difficulties adjusting."

Occasionally, a department of education will employ an information director and fail to even notify the news media that he has been added to the professional staff. Naturally, this convinces the newsmen that his appointment is of little significance and they usually ignore him when dealing with the department. Randy Pendleton Jr., news manager of the United Press International capital bureau, did not learn of the information director's appointment in Alabama until two months after the position was filled. He discovered that the department had an information director when he called to find out when the state board of education would meet; the superintendent's secretary suggested that he call the information director to obtain the information.

Most capital correspondents agreed that even the most qualified information director is of little value unless he is identified by the chief state school officer as a key member of the administrative family and given the over-all responsibility of directing the department's information program. An information director who has little or no influence with the chief state school officer and members of the professional staff is generally ignored by knowledgable capital correspondents.

However, many capital correspondents believe a professionally trained information director who is included in the department's policy making body can help solve three of the four major problems identified with education reporting. Logically, an information director who enjoys the confidence of the chief state school officer could: (1) convince the professional staff of its obligation to speak out on major education issues, (2) equip them with an appreciation for the newsman's problems and an understanding of the newsman's role and (3) help them communicate without using educational jargon.

Change Is Called the Biggest Newsmaker

Newsmen often complain that educators do not know what is newsworthy, and educators charge that newsmen fail to recognize significant and meaningful activities. This section of the questionnaire was not designed to settle the disagreement between newsmen and educators. It is an attempt to identify the trends, programs and problems considered most newsworthy by the nation's capital correspondents.

They were provided a list of education trends, programs and problems and asked to rank them in order of importance according to their news value. The correspondents were also asked to write in any other subjects considered more newsworthy than those listed on the questionnaire.

In tabulating the rankings, a first place vote was assigned 10 points, a second place vote nine points, and so forth. The results were as follows:*

Ranking	Total Points	Trend, Program or Problem
1	622	Demands for improved teacher salaries
2	571	Public reaction to increased cost of education
3	518	Impact of federal aid to education
4	474	Special education programs
5	468	New teaching methods
6	402	Desegregation
7	343	School consolidation
8	342	Shortage of qualified teachers
9	333	Changes in curriculum
10	193	Student activities
	91	All others (write-in selections)

The Number One ranking assigned to the demands for improved teacher salaries was not surprising. This study was started as the school year began, and several states —

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*If all 94 newsmen had completed their ballots a total of 5,170 points would have been recorded. The votes recorded from the questionnaires totaled 4,357. The difference between the possible votes resulted from incomplete ballots by 27 newsmen.
The write-in selections included such subjects as school bond issues, education appropriations, state aid to local schools, textbook selection, teacher unions, adult education programs and school construction. None received enough votes to replace any of the 10 trends, programs or problems listed.

including New York, Michigan and Florida — were being threatened with teacher strikes at that time unless additional funds were provided for improved salaries. Other states were experiencing less militant but still loud demands for improved salaries. The nationwide interest in this problem obviously influenced the capital correspondents' voting.

The second place rank given public reaction to increased cost of education also could have been anticipated because most state legislatures and the U. S. Congress have significantly increased the financial support for education in recent years. Additional taxes are always newsworthy.

While the impact of federal aid to education (Number Three) implies an availability of more federal funds, it was not the additional money alone that promoted the capital correspondents' interest in this subject. Some were interested in the new programs that would be financed by the additional revenue, but equally as many were concerned with the possibility that local schools would become too dependent on the federal government for financial support.

The high ranking given special education programs (Number Four) was not unexpected. Newsmen are trained to look for the unique. They recognize that the public is interested in the exception to the rule and, in most instances, they attempt to report activities that appeal to the public. Since most people have an inherent interest in children and are attracted by "something different," it was only natural that capital correspondents would assign a high priority to a program that attempts to accommodate the special need of a particular group of students.

The fifth place given new teaching methods, however, was not anticipated. Several educators who reviewed the list before it was given to newsmen felt the capital correspondents would rate this subject near the bottom. Other educators who read the questionnaire believed desegregation (Number Six) would be considered more newsworthy than special education programs or new teaching methods.

School consolidation (Number Seven) was not ranked higher because it is not considered a national issue. Interest in school consolidation was strongest in the South, Southwest and Pacific Northwest where the taxpayers are supporting hundreds of small rural schools. Newsmen in these states seemed to share the opinion of many professional educators who advocate the consolidation of small school systems into modern, well-equipped and adequately-staffed school districts.

The fact that the shortage of qualified teachers was ranked eighth has several implications. Some newsmen said they were not convinced that a shortage actually existed. Others — who conceded that there is a shortage — said the demand for improved teacher salaries will result in better pay that will attract more people to the teaching profession.

Several capital correspondents pointed out that the departments of education in their states had never described teacher shortages as a major problem. Others noted that teacher recruitment was the responsibility of local school districts and claimed the state departments of education they work with do not keep records of unfilled teaching positions. However, newsmen in several other state capitals reported that their state departments of education had an active teacher recruitment program and could immediately identify vacant teaching positions in every local school district.

The ninth place rank given changes in curriculum reflects an attitude brought to light in an in-depth news media survey conducted earlier in South Carolina. The South Carolina State Department of Education surveyed every newspaper, radio and television station in the state to determine their interests regarding education, and the vast majority ranked "budgets and building" ahead of "changes in the classroom."* One notable exception was Bob McHugh, managing editor of the *Columbia Record*, who insisted that "what happens in the classroom is without a doubt the most significant education news."

Some educators felt that student activities (ranked last by the newsmen) would be considered more newsworthy because of the recent national publicity given student protests and demonstrations. However, few high school students have been involved in these activities, and most capital correspondents identify state departments of education with the kindergarten through twelfth grade programs. Since this questionnaire was identified as an attempt to determine their relationship with state departments of education, the

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******Editor's note.* It is important to point out, however, that the journalist's interests are not necessarily synonymous with the reader's interests. Readers have been a great deal more interested in curriculum and instruction — and less interested in finance and extracurricular activities — than editors have thought, according to studies by Farley (*What to Tell the People About Public Schools*, Teachers College, Columbia, 1929), Thomas (*A Study of Interests of Readers of Public School Newspaper Publicity*, doctor's thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1944), Jelinek ("A Comparison of Newspaper Coverage of Topics of School News and the Relative Importance of Those Topics According to Certain Lay and Professional Groups," *Journal of Educational Research*, December, 1955), and others.

newsmen assumed student activities meant the activities of elementary and high school students.

Only one capital correspondent commented on his ranking of student activities. Bo Byers of the *Houston Chronicle* listed it fifth on his ballot and then noted, "Maybe this should be Number One because education generally is failing to stir student enthusiasm for learning, for the joy of learning."

A number of conclusions can be reached by an evaluation of the rankings given these 10 education trends, programs and problems, but two appear obvious. Capital correspondents are interested in issues that are current, and they are generally interested in change.

Their interest in current education issues was noted on several of the questionnaires. Don Keough said, "A number of years ago, desegregation would surely have led everyone's list. Now, we view with interest the effects of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act on the public schools in Missouri. Our newspaper has been primarily interested in experimentation and new trends." Don Wasson commented, "It is difficult to rank these subjects. If a school district or system is undergoing the agonies of desegregation or the process of consolidation then, at that particular time, those subjects would rank higher." James Lewis, capital correspondent for United Press International in Nashville, Tennessee, noted, "At times federal aid would be more important than desegregation. At other times teacher salaries would be more important and, naturally, more newsworthy. The difficult thing is to keep all of them in their proper perspective. Some have more value as spot news while others make good feature material."

Lavor Chaffin stated very effectively the relationship between change and current issues. He explained, "The school beat is not a stable one. Newsworthiness shifts from week to week and sometimes almost daily. At budget time, budgets are the most newsworthy. If a new system of instruction is proposed by the state superintendent, at that time, that is the most newsworthy. Generally, I would say sharp CHANGE — be it school finance, curriculum, instruction, consolidation — is the most newsworthy education story."

Stated very simply, there is nothing newsworthy about continuing a program that enjoys uniform popular support. Education, like most other human activity, becomes newsworthy when attempts are made to change or improve traditional practices. An information director who is familiar with the significant changes taking place or being planned in education should have no trouble identifying activities in his department that will be of interest to the capital news corps.

The Other Side of the Coin

While the collective response of the 115 capital correspondents who participated in this study was undeniably critical, not all of the comments were negative.

Paul Harvey Jr., of The Associated Press in Salem, Oregon, said, "I have no problems. I find all of the education officials frank and eager to cooperate."

Hugh Morris, of the *Louisville Courier-Journal,* declared, "We have had for many years a close working relationship and mutual trust with the education department staff and the superintendent, whoever he might be."

Others indicated that the lack of significant education news was partly the fault of the news media. Robert Wood, capital correspondent for The Associated Press in Raleigh, North Carolina, admitted, "In all fairness, the education beat is overlooked, underworked and underplayed in North Carolina."

Another Associated Press correspondent, James Polk who directs the Madison, Wisconsin, capital bureau, recognized the need to assign someone full time to education. He reported, "We have one bureau staffer assigned to concentrate on education. It has paid off well and we have no problems."

Rael Amos, United Press International bureau chief in Jefferson City, Missouri, said, "Education news has not been reported adequately in the past, and I don't believe it is now. It is hard to get information out of the department, but I believe this is our fault and it will be taken care of in the future."

Meet the Press: The Newsmen and Their Mores

meet the press
meet the press
meet the press

Meet the Press: The Newsmen and Their Mores

The number of newsmen assigned to cover state government has grown significantly in recent years. As recently as 1964, there were less than 275 reporters stationed in the 50 state capitals. Now there are more than 400 capital correspondents reporting the activities of the various state officials and agencies.

Many political observers credit the steadily increasing size of these news media delegations to an accelerated interest on the part of the taxpaying citizen. Bob Mann, a veteran Florida legislator, identified this new — or possibly renewed — interest in state government as a "trend of the times." He offered a simple explanation of the public's desire for more information about its elected and appointed officials, saying: "The more government becomes involved in the public's business, the more the public becomes interested in government."

News executives in most states recognized this growing public interest and attempted to provide expanded and improved coverage of their state governments. Editors and news directors realized it was unrealistic — and unfair — to expect capable but often undermanned wire service bureaus in state capitals to provide timely and detailed reports on the activities of the governor, the legislature, cabinet officers, the courts, major state agencies and other key government officials. To provide more meaningful coverage of the increasingly expensive government programs and insure local identification with these public-supported activities, major news media in the larger urban areas assigned veteran reporters to their state capitals on a permanent basis.

These newsmen share the demanding responsibility of keeping the public informed about the programs, goals, successes and failures of state government. Collectively, these wire service representatives, newspaper, radio and television correspondents are identified as the capital news corps.

In every capital these newsmen are an integral part of state government. From the 44-man capital news corps in Sacramento, California, to the one-man Associated Press bureau in Juneau, Alaska, they perform a valuable service. Millions of citizens rely on them for daily accounts of government activity. In many instances, their reports — written, broadcast and filmed — are the only contact the taxpayer has with his elected officials between political campaigns.

As a group, they are experienced, capable, resourceful, cynical and demanding. Individually, they are sometimes too critical, often too sensitive, frequently underpaid, occasionally misinformed but always interested.

In several of the larger states, the capital news corps is an institution. The capital correspondents enjoy a group identity and their presence is recognized and accepted by all knowledgeable officials. The competition among newsmen in these more firmly established capital news corps is keen, and most of them approach their jobs with considerable professional pride. They are quick to recognize the ability — or lack of it — in any newcomer to their group. Those who are poorly equipped seldom last long. Despite the keen competition and occasional personality conflicts, they possess a unique *esprit de corps*. Their collective professional pride and group sensitivity is not usually an obvious characteristic, but it becomes immediately apparent when they believe one of their number has been wronged. They are not unlike members of a large family who frequently criticize each other but react with uniform hostility when an outsider voices criticism.

In other states, the capital news corps is a loosely-knit collection of out-of-town newsmen who share a common identity only when they gather for an occasional governor's news conference or meet out of habit at the neighborhood bar and grill. A continuing awareness of their presence in the state capital usually results from the efforts of one or two exceptional correspondents rather than the collective activity of the entire news corps. Bill Minor, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune's* veteran correspondent and dean of the Jackson, Mississippi, capital news corps, and Hugh Morris, an "old pro" with the *Louisville (Kentucky) Courier-Journal*, are examples of enterprising newsmen who constantly remind state officials of the presence of the capital news corps.

In a few states, the capital news corps consists of an overworked wire service reporter trying to establish a working relationship with key officials who do not understand his needs or appreciate his problems.

Regardless of the size, ability or prestige of the various capital news corps, they are never ignored. Governors, legislators, elected and appointed officials with major state agencies as well as enterprising lobbyists seek their endorsement. It would be inaccurate and possibly too generous to say they are popular. Their critical nature precludes popularity. However, they are usually respected and, in a few cases, feared.

To suggest that they have simply created an awareness of their presence in the various state capitals would be to make a monumental understatement. Many of these veteran newsmen have made significant contributions to better government. Often their searching investigations have exposed corruption and conflicts of interest. Frequently their probing reports have resulted in corrective or long-overdue legislation. On numerous occasions, their tenacious searches for the truth have transferred blame and responsibility from dedicated career employees to less conscientious but more evasive politicians.

The capital news corps is a talented group. Included in its number are some of the most capable writers, accomplished researchers and astute political observers in the nation. Critics claim that some of these newsmen lack the experience and maturity to accurately interpret and report the growing complexities of state government. While this is true, the majority do a creditable job and a few possess a keen and unique understanding of their complicated political environment. Many of them become students of government and acquire an insight that often qualifies them for positions of responsibility in government. State agencies, commissions and boards throughout the nation are dotted with former capital correspondents who were offered career opportunities after earning recognition for distinguished government reporting.

During their tenure as capital correspondents, a few of the more zealous newsmen become "personalities." Martin Waldron, a notoriously sloppy dresser who humored his weight problem, became the best known newsman in Florida during his colorful and controversial career as a capital correspondent for the *Tampa Tribune* and *St. Petersburg Times*. During his tenure in Tallahassee, he won a Pulitzer Prize for the *St. Petersburg Times* with a series of stories about the refinancing and extension of the Florida Turnpike. Described by a colleague as having the temperment of a wounded bear, Waldron's face and reputation were better known in the state capital than many responsible officials. Capital correspondents like Waldron are singled out by their colleagues as "guys who like to rock the boat." Government officials who have experienced their relentless investigative practices and candid reporting style identify them in equally descriptive but less affectionate terms.

A former governor of Florida recalled, with attempted humor and thinly disguised bitterness, his relationship with some of the personalities in the capital news corps. He said, "I admire anyone who rises above the crowd and makes a name for himself through resourcefulness and personal initiative. I did not resent the few newsmen who attempted to improve their professional reputations during my administration, but I will never understand why a couple of them felt compelled to become living legends at my expense!"

The news stories, columns, broadcasts and filmed reports prepared by these "personalities" are anxiously — but not always eagerly — awaited by top government officials. The most obvious result of their work is that public attention is focused on the decision makers. Many citizens form their opinions of state government in general and state officials in particular from conclusions expressed by their favorite reporter in the state capital.

These newsmen are heroes to some, nuisances to others and a serious threat to the ambitions of a few. Well-intentioned informers constantly provide them with tips about privately-approved but not yet publicly-announced programs. Dismissed state employees plus disappointed and defeated politicians frequently approach them with belated confessions of wrongdoing designed to embarrass the current administration. Politically-active women's groups, civic clubs and neighborhood friends encourage them to "tell us what *really* goes on in the state capital."

Journalism professors invite them into the classroom to acquaint idealistic students with the realities of government reporting. Some of their less renowned but often equally talented news media colleagues speak of them in envious but almost reverent tones. Many impressionable young reporters are awed by their exposés and insist on exaggerating already exaggerated stories about some capital correspondent who defied the governor, the legislature and the courts by refusing to reveal the source of a sensational story.

While most capital correspondents do not become "personalities" — or even attempt to gain such status — they share the spotlight with those who do. In government circles, capital newsmen have a group identity. Those who become "personalities" simply have made more friends and, conversely, more enemies than their colleagues. Government officials privately considering a controversial decision often ask each other, "How do you think those newsmen will react to this?" While they realize the "personalities" will influence a large number of taxpayers with their individual reactions, they clearly recognize that the collective response of the entire capital news corps will significantly affect statewide public opinion.

As you would imagine, capital newsmen are not unaware of their influence. Many have exaggerated opinions of their individual importance. In fairness to them, however, it should be pointed out that their inflated personal esteem has not been completely self-imposed.

Since the first day a newsman was assigned to a state capital, government officials and lobbyists for government-regulated industries have actively sought his friendship, approval and praise. While repeatedly citing the need for objective reporting, politicians and their friends have extended to newsmen a red carpet treatment experienced by few citizens and only a handful of high-ranking government officials.

Open invitations to the endless social activities that flavor their political environment, free and convenient parking adjacent to the capitol building, token rent and in some instances free office space, complimentary football tickets to those big games where attendance is almost a status symbol, and whiskey, hams and turkeys during the traditional holiday seasons are only a few of the courtesies shown members of the older and more established capital news corps.

Naturally, not all government officials court newsmen in this fashion, and not all capital correspondents accept the questionable courtesies extended to them. But the fact that a reporter is forced to accept or reject these overtures creates a climate of self-importance. Simple logic dictates an attitude of prestige and personal esteem on the part of the newsman. "Why," he asks himself, "would I be offered special privileges and gratuities if I were not in a position of influence?"

Ironically, government officials who strive to accommodate capital correspondents on a purely professional basis are more successful than those who seek sympathetic understanding through personal generosity and special privileges. Officials who appreciate news media deadlines, understand the difference between news and publicity and are equipped with a moral awareness of the public's right to know generally establish an enviable relationship with these cautious and skeptical newsmen. Politicians who follow the popular but foolish practice of publicity at any price usually are victims of their own generosity.

Fortunately for the taxpayer, the capital news corps does not isolate itself from publicity-seeking officials who are more concerned with their political future than the public interest. To stay informed about government activity in the state capital, newsmen must maintain a continuing relationship with personally-ambitious politicians as well as conscientious officials and dedicated career employees. They must not only report significant decisions that influence government programs and policies but also recognize the motives that prompt these decisions. This is an extremely difficult job.

It would be unfair to both state officials and the public to maintain that capital correspondents do not make mistakes. Occasionally, they make errors in judgment, sometimes abandon objectivity to reflect the attitude of their employer and, in isolated instances, allow their personal distrust of or dislike for a public official to color their reporting. However, the vast majority have developed an enviable talent for reporting government activity in its true perspective.

Probably the most uniform criticism leveled at capital correspondents is that they interpret government decisions instead of reporting them. This fascinating argument probably never will be settled to everyone's satisfaction. Newsmen argue among themselves about the difference between reporting and interpreting news events, and even the most conscientious reporters can't divorce the two.

Reporters and editors make decisions every day about the amount of interpretation to include in a news story. For example, a public official may cite poor health or an attractive job opportunity in private business as the reason for his resignation when it is, in fact, common knowledge that he was forced to resign. Newsmen ask, "How can you honestly report that Joe Doe resigned because of poor health when everyone from his secretary to the governor knows he was pressured into quitting?"

Many capital correspondents contend that there would be no need to interpret news events if government officials would not attempt to deceive them. Others insist on interpretation of news events as an absolute necessity, and they claim that the public would be misled if it were simply given "matter of fact" reports.

George Thurston, a veteran television correspondent with 12 years of experience as a capital correspondent in Tallahassee, Florida, defended with sound logic and strong personal conviction the practice of interpreting news events. "Realistically," he said, "we understand the political considerations that forbid a completely frank relationship between newsmen and government officials. But it seems to me that our critics often overlook the complexity of state government and the necessity to simplify it so laymen can understand what really is being reported." He continued:

"Objectivity can be carried to such an extreme that it actually distorts the truth. Several years ago the legislature

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Ironically, government officials who strive to accommodate capital correspondents on a purely professional basis are more successful than those who seek sympathetic understanding through personal generosity and special privileges. Officials who appreciate news media deadlines, understand the difference between news and publicity and are equipped with a moral awareness of the public's right to know generally establish an enviable relationship with these cautious and skeptical newsmen. Politicians who follow the popular but foolish practice of publicity at any price usually are victims of their own generosity.

Fortunately for the taxpayer, the capital news corps does not isolate itself from publicity-seeking officials who are more concerned with their political future than the public interest. To stay informed about government activity in the state capital, newsmen must maintain a continuing relationship with personally-ambitious politicians as well as conpassed a bill to increase teacher salaries by an average of $1,000 per teaching unit. This was a matter of record and could not be disputed. But to report this fact without pointing out that there were more teachers than teaching units would have created the false impression that every teacher would get a $1,000 raise. As I recall, this particular bill actually resulted in a raise of about $600 per teacher. Legislators who were publicly taking credit for giving the teachers a $1,000 raise naturally didn't appreciate our pointing this out, but the teachers did."

Thurston said legislators are not alone in their desire to have newsmen report only those facts that benefit them. "Educators are guilty of the same thing when dealing with the legislature and the public," he asserted. "When the education department and state education association try to get more money for teacher salaries, they point to nearby states and cite the higher salaries guaranteed by legislative appropriations in those states.

"The records will support the fact that *state-guaranteed* salaries in those states are higher. What the education lobbyist doesn't say is that teachers in those states get only token salary supplements from their *local* school boards and actually make *less* than teachers in your state who get far more generous local support."

Thurston concluded, "My obligation as a newsman requires that I report all related facts — not just the obvious facts. If this is interpreting the news, then I gladly plead guilty."

Thurston's sentiments generally reflect the attitude of most capital newsmen. They are not satisfied with the obvious facts. In both of the examples he cited, the obvious facts were misleading.

The capital newsman's only real justification for being in the state capital is his ability to look behind the scenes, identify hidden circumstances that create an obvious condition and relate obscure but important information to apparent but often superficial facts.

The most inexperienced reporter could report that the governor vetoed a sales tax increase or that the state board of education approved a plan to reorganize the state department of education. While both stories would be significant in themselves, they could become much more meaningful to the taxpayer when interpreted by a knowledgeable capital correspondent like Earl (Squire) Behrens of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, dean of the Sacramento, California, news corps — or Barbara Frye, the United Press International bureau chief in Tallahassee, Florida, who has 23 years of capital reporting experience.

As a rule, capital newsmen have the ability and maturity to accurately reflect the significance of government activity. While a few of them jokingly tell the governor they could cure all the ills of state government if they had his job for a week, the vast majority quietly and efficiently perform their serious responsibility of interpreting decisions that directly affect the unsuspecting taxpayer.

Any attempt to summarize the character of the capital news corps, however, must include an admission that some of its members fall short of the high professional standards identified with most of this group. As indicated earlier, capital correspondents are not overwhelmingly popular in government circles. Regretably, this lack of popularity cannot always be attributed to their professional obligation and personal commitment to "publish the truth no matter who it hurts." The personal weaknesses reflected in the professional habits of a minority have seriously damaged the already-strained relationship between some government officials and the news media.

In many instances, this minority must accept the blame for the evasive and often hostile attitude of some public officials and career employees. Through childish attempts to show that they are not awed by the presence or prestige of the governor, state cabinet officers and other top government officials, they are rude. They seem convinced their bad manners will demonstrate that they are not impressed with public officials whose positions command at least polite recognition from everyone else.

Members of this inconsiderate minority expect prompt attention to their requests but frequently arrive late for appointments. They ask government employees to provide detailed information that requires considerable research, but discard it rather than change their conclusion if it does not support their preconceptions.

When there is a lull in newsworthy activity at the state capital, they "gang up" on a minor mistake by an official or agency, knowing collective criticism can exaggerate error. When faced with a pressing deadline, they report unfounded assumptions or attempt to recall details that have escaped their memory. When criticized by their state editors for missing a major story, they retaliate by filing what appears to be an equally significant scoop that is built on innuendo and information from sources who asked not to be identified. They expect perfection in a public official's conduct while displaying glaring weaknesses in their own behavior. This prompts many state officials to suggest, "They wouldn't throw so many stones if they lived in glass houses, as we do."

Fortunately for government officials and the public, newsmen who are guilty of these practices are few in number and usually enjoy short-lived careers as capital correspondents. Their editors or news directors soon recognize that they are not equipped to handle such responsible assignments and replace them with more qualified reporters. Regretably, the professionally-capable capital correspondents who strive to be fair must overcome the resentment and distrust created by their departed and disliked colleagues.

It is truly a short-sighted state official who uses a distasteful experience with an ill-equipped newsman as a valid reason for avoiding all capital correspondents. The advantages of having alert and experienced newsmen in the state capital far outweigh the unfortunate experiences of a few officials who may be misquoted or unfairly criticized by unqualified reporters.

The vast majority of capital correspondents take their work seriously and are acutely aware of their demanding responsibility. For every reporter who hastily writes a story based on unfounded conclusions, ten spend weeks investigating a rumor and then appropriately determine that it is not based on fact or that the source is not reliable. The number of newsmen who ignore reliable research are far outnumbered by their colleagues who diligently search for valid evidence that will expose a popular fallacy. For every official who has been unfairly criticized, there are hundreds whose reputations — and jobs — have been saved by enterprising capital correspondents who doggedly pursue the facts.

Unfortunately, the faults of the few irresponsible capital newsmen are more obvious than the virtues of the remaining majority. There are several reasons for this.

First, the critics of the capital news corps are far more vocal than its admirers. Beaten and bitter politicians almost uniformly blame the biased newsmen for their defeats while conscientious state officials seldom commend capital correspondents for informing the public about questionable or ill-advised programs.

Second, most capital newsmen are indifferent to praise or public recognition. Their "who needs it?" attitude discourages government officials from publicly recognizing the valuable service they perform. Most capital correspondents are so unaccustomed to favorable recognition that they question the intentions of those who express appreciation.

Don Wasson, a veteran reporter who has worked in several state capitals, reflects this suspicious attitude, so typical of capital newsmen throughout the nation. "When they (government officials) start bragging about the great job you're doing, you'd better take a closer look at what they're doing. Everybody appreciates a sincere pat on the back, but it doesn't bother us if we don't get it. We have a professional identity that allows us to do our job, and that's all we need."

Third, the capital correspondent's determined — and sometimes stubborn — commitment to get the job done does not endear him to many people in government circles. His impatience with and disregard for protocol, his obligation to ask embarrassing questions and his constant concern about pressing deadlines do not give him the luxury of practicing public relations while gathering facts for a news story. His no-nonsense approach to his job is often interpreted as a lack of consideration for other people and invites criticism from those who do not understand the newsman's problems.

These three conditions contribute to the unfavorable impression many government officials and state employees have of capital correspondents. This unfortunate and generally undeserved image makes it easy for critics of the capital news corps to find a receptive, attentive and sympathetic audience. Only those who have worked with these newsmen on a day-to-day basis over a period of years appreciate the valuable contributions they have made and are making to better government.

Their persistent pursuit of the truth makes them appear insensitive to the problems, pressures and obligations that influence everyone who lives and works in a political environment. Unfortunately, the capital correspondent's professional and personal compulsion to expose corrupt or self-serving officials in state government is so strong that it overshadows and obscures his unique compassion for the thousands of dedicated employees who work in the same environment.

This compassion is demonstrated in many ways, but it is not easily recognized. It is expressed when a newsman restrains himself from blasting a dedicated state official for a costly but honest error in judgment. It is hidden in the newsman's silent understanding that many state employees are obligated to implement programs they cannot conscientiously support. It exists in the necessarily unrecorded recognition given respected career employees who confide in a newsman about questionable government activity. It is found in the newsman's quiet appreciation for the fact that open opposition to administration-sponsored programs might cost these capable employees their jobs.

Unfortunately, this compassion is not obvious to most state officials and employees. Many of those who have been spared public criticism because of this compassion never realize it. Others — like the ones who confide in capital newsmen — cannot testify to its existence without exposing themselves to the serious consequences that would inevitably follow.

This jealously guarded compassion is usually reserved for the rank and file career employees who are dedicated to their jobs. However, it occasionally is extended to inexperienced but promising officials who are in the vulnerable position of learning how to compete with their more aggressive and sophisticated political colleagues.

It is only natural that capital correspondents limit their effectively concealed compassion to these individuals. These are the people with whom they identify. Most capital correspondents privately envision themselves as the little man's friend, the guardians of public interest or journalistic watchdogs whose presence cautions greedy politicians against self-serving activity.

Their experiences in the various state capitals apparently have convinced them that nice guys finish last when reporting government activity. They have adjusted to this challenging environment by becoming as aggressive and demanding as the most ambitious politician.

Like the decisions and activities they report, capital correspondents must be interpreted to be understood.

They complement their unique ability to "spot a phony a mile away" by successfully masquerading as journalism's tough guys. They act indifferent to the possibility that a dedicated career employee may lose his job because of a change of administration while quietly planting tips about his ability with key supporters of the incoming governor.

They feel obligated to publish the salaries of top government officials while privately hoping the public reaction to these apparently generous figures will not hurt the chances for many underpaid employees to get more money.

They are compelled to identify the shortcomings of poorly-qualified state officials but are frustrated by the realization that their constant criticism of the incumbents may discourage capable but sensitive men and women from seeking public office.

They reveal the steadily increasing number of employees being added to the state payroll while recognizing that most taxpayers will cry "political patronage" and unfairly overlook the unrealistic workload assigned many conscientious career employees.

They gripe a lot about their working conditions and continually condemn the political environment in which they live. But few pursue other job opportunities. In fact, many of them rebel when their state editor or news director suggests the possibility of their coming home from the capital to accept a promotion that includes shorter and better hours plus more pay.

As pointed out earlier, the capital news corps has become an institution in many states. Its number will continue to grow, and its influence will become increasingly significant. It will continue to be distrusted by those who have something to hide, misunderstood by many who have nothing to fear and respected by the few who appreciate the valuable contribution it is making.

The capital newsman wouldn't have it any other way.

Appendix

appendix

Appendix

CAPITAL NEWS CORPS QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Age: Sex: Marital Status: Number of Children:

Media Represented (Name of newspaper, radio or television station, etc.):

Title: Bureau Chief Capital Correspondent Other

Educational Background: High School Junior College
College Post-Graduate Degree

News Media Experience: (Indicate the total number of years working experience and identify the newspaper, radio or television station you represented.)

A capital newsman is expected to report the activities of key government officials and major state agencies. Excluding the legislature, which of the following individuals and agencies commands most of your attention. (Rank 1 through 10.)

____ Governor
____ Cabinet officers (Secretary of State, Attorney General, State Comptroller, State Treasurer, Secretary of Agriculture, Superintendent of Public Instruction, etc.)
____ Department of Public Safety
____ State Health Department
____ State Industrial Commission
____ State Highway Department
____ State Department of Education
____ State Park Department
____ State Forestry Department
____ State Welfare Department
____ Other
____ Other
____ Other

1. Does the department of education in your state have a public information director? YES _____ NO _____ (If NO, answer question No. 2 and continue to Page 61.)

2. Do you believe the employment of a public information director by the state department of education is warranted? (Is there sufficient public interest in the programs, policies and activities of the department to justify a professionally-trained information specialist?) YES _____ NO _____

3. Do you believe the department of education's information director is qualified by training and experience to anticipate the needs of the news media and provide the necessary service? YES _____ NO _____

4. Do you believe the information director is qualified to serve as spokesman for the department of education? (Would you quote him in a news story if you were unable to contact the state commissioner or superintendent of education?) YES _____ NO _____

5. Is the department's information director a reliable news source? (Does he keep you informed about major changes in department programs, policies and activities that affect public education in your state?) YES _____ NO _____

6. Have you ever visited his office? YES _____ NO _____

7. How frequently does he visit the capital news room? Several times a week _____. At least once a week _____. Less frequently than once a week_____. Has never visited the news room _____.

8. How would you rate his news releases? Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

9. Have you ever called him at home after "working hours" or during a weekend to help you locate a department official for an immediate response to an inquiry or to secure information that you need promptly? YES _____ NO _____

10. Was he conscientious in his effort to help you? (Did he locate the person you were trying to contact and have him call you? Did he return to his office and secure the information you needed?) YES _____ NO _____

11. Does he confide in newsmen? (Will he talk "off the record" or provide background information that can be attributed to "a department spokesman"?) YES _____ NO _____

12. Do you believe he is committed to the "freedom of information" concept? (Would he provide information that is unfavorable to the department of education, etc.?) YES _____ NO _____

To assist the news media in reporting significant activities of a state department of education, a public information director should possess certain characteristics and skills. List in the order of importance *to you* the following characteristics and skills that are desirable in a public information director. (Rank in importance, 1 through 8.) Add any others you feel are significant.

____ Objectivity
____ News media experience
____ Ability to write clearly and concisely
____ Research experience
____ Cooperative attitude
____ Familiarity with department programs and policies
____ Promptness in answering inquiries (awareness of deadlines, etc.)
____ Ability to translate educational jargon into layman's language
____ Other:
____ Other:

Education is a new "beat" for many capital newsmen. Only in recent years have the news media attempted to evaluate and report changes in education. Educators are equally inexperienced in working with the news media. Many veteran educators are finding themselves the subject of interviews and news conferences for the first time in their professional careers. This condition has created many problems for newsmen attempting to report education news and educators trying to explain changes in education.

Please identify some of the major problems you have encountered in attempting to report education news.

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8.
9.
10.

An in-depth survey in South Carolina in February, 1967, revealed that most newsmen consider "budgets and new buildings" the most newsworthy items when reporting education activities. A minority of the newsmen indicated new teaching methods, new subject matter and other "changes in the classroom" were more newsworthy than increased financial support and improved facilities.

Which of the following education trends, programs and problems do you consider the most newsworthy? (Rank 1 through 10.) Please identify any others you believe are more important than the ones listed.

_____ New teaching methods

_____ Special education programs (for physically handicapped, mentally retarded, intellectually superior, economically deprived, etc.)

_____ Shortage of qualified teachers

_____ Impact of federal aid to education

_____ Changes in curriculum

_____ Student activities (accomplishments, problems and attitudes)

_____ Desegregation

_____ Demands for improved teacher salaries

_____ School consolidation

_____ Public reaction to increased cost of education

_____ Other:

_____ Other:

Production
Type: Various sizes and weights of hand-set and linotype Melior.
Paper: Cover stock is Curtis Tweedweave dazzling white cover, basis 80; chapter dividers are Curtis Tweedweave nugget gold text, basis 80; body is Hopper Sonata natural vellum text, basis 80.
Ink: All Capico PMS 185 and black.
Printing: Offset on a 37" x 49½" Harris two color press at 3500 iph.
Binding: "Perfect" binding.

Design

Capitol domes, typewriters, and microphones were the only images that came to mind on the first reading of this report. Somehow, it all seemed a little too familiar. The manuscript was read again — and again — in search of a visual theme that would say more.

In time, an underlying theme emerged: The press is an institution as deeply involved in Western history as the public school, and yet educators often regard capital newsmen as intruders in the business of our civilization.

To convey the long tradition of the press, old drawings from the Bettmann Archive collection were used. They are not in every case what they seem. The cover illustration, for example, does not show a newspaper press but a rolling press for compressing the pages of a book. Nevertheless, it is visually right, and it does suggest the printer's trade.

In addition, the usually straightforward appendix and foreword were turned into visual puns by allowing for extra play in the designer's sense of illustration. But even when the engravings do not illustrate content directly, they are all rendered in a bold, direct style which the designer felt was in keeping with the direct, matter-of-fact style of the author.

Colored stock for divider pages and two-color printing were chosen to demonstrate the possibilities of a relatively inexpensive design. In the interest of maintaining the directness, however, the full range of possibilities was not exploited. The designer avoided tricky devices and chose, rather, to achieve the more powerful impact of solids on colored stock.

The body type is Melior, a modern cutting of a traditional type face. Set in columns narrower and deeper than usual for pages of this size, the type is meant to give a slight newspaper quality to the look of the pages.

Red ink tends to brighten the otherwise grey pages and compensates in some measure for the sparsity of illustration. (It was for the sake of economy that only five line drawings were finally used.) Similarly, the large, open-face page numbers help break the grey uniformity of the text.

This, then, is a demonstration publication of Project Public Information. It shows what can be done with a fairly simple and inexpensive format. Perhaps more importantly it demonstrates one designer's response to the particular demands of the message contained here. Hopefully, every publication will have a message of its own and, accordingly, a unique design.

Credits

Editor: Dean W. O'Brien, Project Public Information
Design: William Kennedy, Knoxville, Tennessee.
Typography: Graphic Composition, Inc., Menasha, Wisconsin.
Printing: Sauls Lithograph Company, Inc., Washington, D.C.
Binding: Graphic Arts Finishing Company, Baltimore, Maryland.

All illustrations from The Bettmann Archive, 136 East 57th Street, New York, New York.